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GAMING SYSTEM CUSTOMER SERVICE TECHNIQUES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to gaming systems, and more particularly relates to communications with gaming locations and gaming service stations.

[0002] A large casino typically employs thousands of gaming locations that include non-machine games and machine games. Users of the games typically desire to place orders or reservations as they play, and they may desire to exchange messages with other users. Messaging systems used in casinos in the past have failed to provide such capability. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,429,361 (Raven et al., issued July 4, 1995), describes a 12 character dot-

matrix LED display 30 that can display messages to a player and a keypad that the player can use to send messages to a control unit. However, the system is not sufficiently interactive and flexible to allow users to efficiently place orders or reservations or to exchange messages.

[0003] U.S. Patent No. 5,951,397 (Dickinson, issued Sept. 14, 1999) and U.S. Patent No. 6,210,279 (Dickinson, issued April 3, 2001) each discloses a touch screen used in a gaming machine. However, the touch screens are CRTs and are used for operation of the game. Such screens would be too large for effective use in a messaging system suitable for coupling to a gaming machine.

[0004] This invention addresses the problems presented by the foregoing patents and provides a solution.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] One form of the invention is useful in a gaming system comprising a service station and at least a first gaming location. In such an environment, communication with the service station and the first gaming location is enabling by providing an interactive first communication

unit operable from the first gaming location, including a first display visible from the first gaming location, an interactive second communication unit operable from the service station, including a second display visible from the service station, and a network arranged to transmit data so that messages are displayed on the first display and the second display.

[0006] Another apparatus form of the invention is useful in a gaming system comprising a first gaming location and a second gaming location. In such an environment, communication between the first and second gaming locations is enabled by providing apparatus comprising an interactive first communication unit operable from the first gaming location, including a first display visible from the first gaming location and arranged to display a first message, an interactive second communication unit operable from the second gaming location, including a second display visible from the service station and arranged to display a second message, and a network arranged transmit data between the first and second gaming locations, whereby the first and second messages are exchanged.